

CONFIDENTIAL

MAR LODGE MEETING 30 JUNE 1994

Purpose

To discuss access issues at Mar Lodge and possible future policy, in relation to existing use, existing Trust policy and donors' wishes.

Present

Bob Aitken (BA)	Scottish Countryside Activities Council
Bob Reid (BR)	Grampian Regional Council
George R Russell (GRR)	National Trust for Scotland, Member of Council and in charge of liaison with the Easter Trust
Paul Johnson (PJ)	National Trust for Scotland, Chief Ranger
Charles Strang (CAS)	National Trust for Scotland, Head of Policy and Research
Patrick Begg (PB)	National Trust for Scotland, Management Planner.

CAS outlined the background to the Trust's recent interest in the possible acquisition of Mar Lodge Estate and briefly explained the role of the Easter Trust.

GRR explained his role in bringing together Mr Kluge and the Easter Trust and stressed that the Trust wished to remain anonymous. He reported his recent telephone discussions with trustees and confirmed that their principal condition was that Mar Lodge Estate should remain as a sporting estate.

He confirmed that there are no residual conditions from Kluge, apart from him retaining ownership of Claybockie Cottage. Any conditions being imposed would be done by the Easter Trust and would survive beyond the point when ownership would be handed over to NTS. Whether such conditions would be legally enshrined is as yet uncertain; NTS staff clearly expressed the hope that they would not.

BA expressed strong concern that any conditions being imposed or management strategy ensuing might be perceived as yet another distant land owner defining estate management in a secretive way and then dumping it on the local population without reference to their wishes. CAS responded that the Trust is broadly lifting potential future management strategy from the Consortium Report and that this approach is generally supported by the Easter Trust.

GRR reminded everybody that Kluge is paranoid about publicity and the Easter Trust also wish to retain their anonymity.

Management Aims and Objectives

Trust staff briefly introduced Section 4 of the acquisition appraisal, outlining management aims and objectives for the estate. GRR reported his conversation with a trustee last night - the trustees have recently seen the aims and objectives. One crucial point they wish to raise is that Mar Lodge should be seen as a special case as far as the Trust is concerned with regard to future

management. It should not be lumped with Glencoe, Kintail and so on as sporting management of stalking and grouse shooting must be retained in harmony with other Trust purposes, as long as such sporting activity remains legal. The trustees would probably wish to see such sporting use enshrined in the aims. However, they would have little problem with deer numbers being dramatically reduced. BR has consulted within the MC of S and there is general agreement that a demonstration of stalking in harmony with access would be a useful development. He will attempt to arrange written support for this approach at Mar Lodge from MC of S and the Ramblers Association.

There was then a general discussion as to whether walker access would be compromised by this wish for a sporting approach; GRR felt that this was probably inevitable. BR, on the other hand, suggested that stalking needs to be compromised slightly in order to accommodate walkers along the routes that they regularly follow. It was suggested that stalking in future should adhere to the wild land principle, ie stalking would take place by walking in and extraction by ponies; this more traditional approach would be a point to interpret. This would probably be acceptable to the trustees who would be in favour of ponies rather than landrovers for carcass removal, although it was agreed that there may be a need for vehicle use at least in the early days during hind culling.

CAS felt that commercial activities should be subservient to the Trust functions of preservation/conservation/restoration and public access; he also reminded everybody that there would be a problem with Unna with regard to sporting stalking. GRR suggested that subservience might not be acceptable to the trustees who would prefer to see uses being carried out "in harmony". It was finally agreed that aims 1 and 2 would remain as they are with a new aim 3 expressing the trustees' wish to retain sporting activity on the estate; GRR may produce slightly new wording for 1 and 2 to take on board the sporting interest.

Agenda Items

1. Zoning

GRR reported the anxiety that the trustees feel over zoning, as it can be perceived as the thin end of the wedge. For instance would zoning allow a development of interpretive facilities at Derry Lodge? In general the trustees are happy with the concept but uneasy about the potential practice.

BR promoted the concept of "porous" boundaries, whereby the mountain core zone might expand through time as restoration takes place.

BA promoted the idea of two zones: zone 1 would consist of perhaps over 95% of the estate and would be the core wild land, with an assumption of restoration and regressive use. Zone 2 would be the small section of the estate in the low ground close to the road where the possibility for development would be kept open.

There was discussion as to whether different zones could be considered for different purposes. For instance should wild land be allowed to resume the cultural landscape of Glen Lui, obliterating it with woodland. Also, BA stressed that it would be impractical to remove the track to Derry at present as there will continue to be a strong use in the medium term for accelerated hind culling and access for footpath teams. Again a longer term view would be more appropriate here with the eventual main objective of closing the track down to vehicular use.

With regard to bike use, BR stressed that by-laws simply wouldn't work while the tracks remain. There is also the problem with the lack of legal clarification as to whether bikes are allowed on rights of way. GRR reported that the trustees would like to do away with them and there was general consensus that again this would be a long term aim towards which we would work.

In conclusion it was agreed that zoning is a useful tool. There is no prospect of zoning sporting use away from other uses as this would be unacceptable to the trustees. We should propose considerable remedial work - track removal should take place but again timing will be critical. The core zone is likely to expand through time.

2. Derry Lodge

BA said it was essential that the future of Derry Lodge was not fudged. It should be part of the core zone and should probably be allowed to gradually deteriorate. GRR reported that the trustees would probably agree with this view though **it was agreed that this would again need to be a long term aim that could be developed through time.** CAS on the other hand felt that the lodge is part of the cultural landscape and so should survive, preferably being put to good use. There was the suggestion that it could be converted to a mountaineering hut but again it was appreciated that this would lead to an increased use of the hills. A major problem with Derry Lodge is its size; any use would almost invariably impact on the wild land quality of the estate simply because the lodge can accommodate so many people. CAS then suggested that it could be refurbished for Trust use including holiday lets while we consider future use. A further proposal was that the mountain rescue team might be relocated in Derry Lodge in the short term, while future road access is considered (it was felt that the issue as to whether the mountain rescue team should be located in the Derry Lodge area at all would best be addressed once a decision has been made as to whether the track up to the lodge should be restored to a footpath). BA and PJ were still very hesitant about any restoration of Derry Lodge. Once money has been invested in its fabric, it would be very unlikely that the Trust would in future agree to this investment deteriorating for wild land purposes.

3. Luibeg

There was general agreement that there would be a need for stables and a base for a stalker/stable lad for deer culling/stalking purposes. There would probably be a similar need on the southern half of the estate and a suitable cottage might have to be identified. The person based at Luibeg could double up as a ranger and therefore manage public access issues in that area. GRR reported that this would probably be agreeable to the Easter Trust.

With regard to other cottages located along the roadside, there was general agreement that these could continue in use and those not at present in use be revived though there was a preference for them not being used as holiday cottages if at all possible. (ie a preference for them being occupied on a permanent basis if at all possible (!))

4. Mountain Rescue Team

The Easter Trust clearly feels strongly about the wild land quality of the hills not being threatened by any new facilities such as bridges being installed to make the hills in any way safer. There was also general agreement that the mountain rescue team's presence at Derry Lodge needs to be reviewed. Perhaps the first move should be to review how regularly the team needs to use the hut, the purposes of the hut and so on. As noted above, any long term move to restore the track to Derry Lodge would obviously impact on their future presence.

5. Bothies

It was generally agreed that it would be desirable to remove all bothies; the Easter Trust would agree with this. It was pointed out that the removal of Corroul would increase the public perception of danger in the hills and pressure might mount to maintain the rescue point at Derry Lodge in consequence. There would obviously be resistance to bothy removal from the Mountain Bothies Association amongst probably many others!

6. Camping

There was general agreement that wild camping should be allowed. The MC of S and SNH are developing a code at present which should be helpful here. While the Easter Trust are not keen on campsites on the lower ground (buffer zone), they do appreciate the practicalities involved in managing camping and a road side campsite would probably not worry them unduly. There was general agreement on the probable need for a road end campsite as part of the management strategy of controlling congregational camping round Derry Lodge.

7. Cars

GRR reported that the Easter Trust are clearly fearful of a development of the Haweswater scenario of car parks becoming full and cars choking the road side, hence their suggestion of a shuttle service. BR reported that the Regional Council is

to erect electronic signs at Glen Muick to indicate that the car park is full; these will be installed at Ballater. The Regional Council has also monitored traffic numbers in Glen Muick for a number of years; BR would hope that he can encourage the Regional Council to install these traffic counters on the Linn road. He will copy us the Glen Muick readings for future reference. It was agreed that no additional car parking should be provided at the Linn of Quoich (apart from formalising the car parking at Quoich), although additional car parking could be provided in the vicinity of Mar Lodge itself.

8. Use of the Lodge

CAS promulgated the future use of the lodge as a visitor destination, with a great opportunity to interpret the cultural landscape, including "traditional" estate sport, with live deer in the "parkland" and possibly a walk into the Scots pine wood. GRR reported that the Easter Trust are happy for the lodge to be used sympathetically; they would not wish to see any new buildings or new facilities such as swimming pools being constructed to attract in additional use. They would be very unhappy about the development of "side-line activities", again encouraging additional use that otherwise would not occur.

BR pointed out that Grampian Region is already overblessed with stately homes and he therefore strongly recommended an alternative use: a World Heritage Centre could encompass education, interpretation and research and would be compatible with the wider interests of the estate.

9. The Millennium Fund

The possibility of putting forward large scale restoration of Caledonian forest within the Cairngorms and Loch Lomond areas is being strongly tipped for Millennium funding. CAS reported that we are already talking to the National Heritage Memorial Fund about endowment funding for the future. They have intimated that monies should be forthcoming from the lottery, but they cannot commit themselves as yet nor can we commit ourselves to the acquisition of Mar Lodge ahead of them approving endowment money from the lottery in April of 1995 at the earliest. Millennium bids only go in during April 1995 by which time the lottery money may be available. GRR reported that the Easter Trust would be happy for the estate to be funded from this sort of source in the future.

10. Bridges

Time was running out at this point so there was no discussion, though general agreement that there should be a presumption in favour of bridges being removed where practical.

11. Grouse

GRR reported that muirburn could well be an issue as the trustees would wish it to continue if it can be shown to be to the benefit of grouse. They have also expressed the wish to retain open moorland in a southern sector of the estate, in

other words that not all of the ground should be restored to wild woodland. It was agreed that the future policy would probably depend on a scientific conclusion to the sustainable benefits or otherwise of muirburn in grouse moor management. It was also agreed that the current muirburn activity was scarring the landscape.

12. Rights of Way

It was briefly pointed out that, while we might very well wish to remove bridges including vehicle bridges, it might be impossible to do so on rights of way. For instance a vehicular bridge might well be convertible to a footbridge, but removal might be legally untenable.

13. Organised Events

There was a general agreement that existing NTS policy should apply.

Finally BA pointed out that we had covered a number of very delicate subjects and if we were to implement all of the policies agreed during our discussion the result would be seen as quite revolutionary. He questioned whether we would be able to carry with us existing mountain users, local residents, local authorities, SNH board members and particularly the Council of NTS. Without doubt, if we are to carry through the majority of the policy outlined above, we are all in for an interesting year or two! It was agreed that early consultation, with Council members and others, would be a prerequisite.

Paul Johnson
1 July 1994

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